



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

J. HERBERT NELSON, II
STATED CLERK

Dear Mr. President,

The decision by the U.S. Government to resettle only 30,000 refugees in the Federal Fiscal Year 2019 is devastating news. It is devastating news for the thousands of refugees who are living in a place of temporary refuge, their lives put on hold as they look for a country willing to open its doors to them. It is devastating news for the thousands of refugees already resettled in the United States who are separated from loved ones by war, flight, and left behind, waiting to be reunited. It is devastating news for Presbyterian congregations and other communities of faith who have heard God's call to welcome the stranger and have spent weeks or months preparing to make a new home for resettled refugees. It is devastating news for the caseworkers, job counselors, English teachers, and other resettlement staff, many of whom are former refugees themselves, who see their noble vocation attacked and their ministry pushed aside. It is devastating for this country, because we know we are a better nation when we offer refuge and welcome others.

We understand the Exodus story of the Israelites to be a part of our own collective history. As the Israelites traversed difficult terrain facing famine and thirst on their journey, they cried out to God believing they had been forsaken. God responded saying, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day," (Exodus 16:4, NRSV). God promised to care for them and never leave them if they had faith. We are all God's chosen—born from God and will return to God. Considering this, how are we to remain faithful? Does that not mean we must welcome those who seek protection, freedom, and peace? Does that mean we open the doors to those who share similar experiences of those of the Israelites? They should not be condemned to a life of struggle and a life without home. They are God's children, and we are challenged to provide welcome.

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I reject the U.S. Administration's mis-characterization of refugees as people to be feared or despised. Like the Apostle Peter, we cannot call people unholy whom God has declared holy. Like the prophet Balaam before him, we cannot curse those whom God has blessed. We honor God's call to attend to the needs of the orphan, widow, and stranger (Matthew 25: 35–40). Through Christ Jesus, we know the stranger becomes our neighbor, even our sibling. The FY2019 Presidential Determination need not be the last word. We, therefore, ask President Trump to turn back the dismantling of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program that has given more than 3 million refugees the chance to rebuild their lives. Even now, Mr. President, you can reject fear and choose welcome.

In the faith we share through Christ,

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)